

President Barack Obama's announcement that he plans to ask Congress for a three-year freeze on some federal spending doesn't mean that every local program that gets help from Washington will have to go begging for money somewhere else.

Rob Nabors, deputy director of Obama's Office of Management and Budget said in a call with reporters today that the administration is not talking about "an across-the-board cut." Nabors said his department's 500 analysts have spent the last three months "going through the budget line by line trying to find savings."

Some agencies are not part of this freeze on "discretionary" spending. Cuts won't be made in the departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs or Homeland Security. And this freeze doesn't include mandatory programs like Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

Items that Obama has made a top priority – such as education and clean energy research – also will likely not be touched.

"It's kind of like the person who robbed your home returning a toaster oven and expecting you to be happy about it," Rep. John Campbell, R-Irvine, said of Obama's proposal.

Campbell said Obama already inflated the federal budget by \$140 billion because of the stimulus package and the only way to really cut spending is to base the freeze on spending levels before that recovery act bill.

"I appreciate the effort but come on, he made an absolutely enormous increase in spending in his one year in office," Campbell said.

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Huntington Beach, said after Obama presided over the "biggest surge of spending and giveaways in the history of the world, his call for a freeze now may not be seen as genuine."

But Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., sees the freeze as a step toward fiscal responsibility.

"This is consistent with what we did in Congress under President Clinton, when we turned record deficits into record surpluses," said Boxer. "As long as it's not across the board and you can choose your priorities, I think it's workable."

But some Orange County programs and projects that rely on federal funds could be on the chopping block as far as the administration is concerned.

One agency to watch for is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Such efforts as the Santa Ana flood control project count on federal funds and the Corps's \$2 billion budget could well take a hit. The Santa Ana project got \$49.3 million in federal funds last year.

But, says Orange County's Washington lobbyist Jim McConnell, the Corps has a lot of discretion in deciding how even limited funding will be allocated. The Corps considers the risk of flood from the Santa Ana the most serious such threat west of the Mississippi so it could still receive funding even in an atmosphere of cuts.

One perennial target for both Democratic and Republican administrations has been the COPS program, which includes about 20 programs geared to help community policing efforts.

Orange County police departments received \$7 million in COPS money last year, the most going to Santa Ana, which got \$6.7 million.

Traditionally the administration cuts those programs from the budget and lawmakers restore them because they are so popular back home.

Rep. Loretta Sanchez, D-Santa Ana, whose district probably gets more federal money than any

other in Orange County, said she needs to see the details of Obama's freeze proposal before she can say whether she supports it.

Regardless, she said, "I still think I'll be able to get what we need."

Another item that often is slashed by presidents is the reimbursement to state and local governments for housing illegal immigrants.

California's senators each year fight to restore that funding but it never gets fully put back. Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer joined other border-state lawmakers last fall writing to Obama and asking him to fully pay for the costs of incarcerating these immigrants.

California spends \$950 million to house them but only expects to get \$111 million back from the federal government.

The Orange County Sheriff's Department spends \$33.6 million a year to house these prisoners but only budgeted for \$6 million from the federal government.

County budget director Frank Kim said he will also be watching to see whether housing assistance grants are cut. More than 90 percent of the money spent on such programs comes from the federal government, mainly through the Community Development Block Grants,